

Global Refuge's Support for Council Bill 24-0584  
October 23, 2024

Good afternoon,

My name is Krish O'Mara Vignarajah. I am the President and CEO of Global Refuge, and I am here today to testify in support of Bill 24-0584, which would codify Baltimore City's language access policy.

**A. Introduction**

Global Refuge is the largest faith-based nonprofit dedicated to serving newcomers. We operate in 50 states and recently opened an office in Guatemala. As the President and CEO, I'm so proud that in 5 years we have grown from 70 to 750 employees with a budget today of over \$300 million today. We provide services in partnership with the federal government, resettling refugees and serving unaccompanied children, and facilitate programs and services for immigrants and New Americans including mental healthcare, legal services, financial literacy and employment skills, and job placement assistance. While our reach is national and international, our home is Maryland, specifically Baltimore, where we are celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> year in the city. Our headquarters is based on Light Street, just steps from the Inner Harbor and right across from the Maryland Science Center; this year, we have also had the opportunity to expand our reach to provide more services for immigrants and refugees in the Baltimore area through the opening of our Welcome Center in Fells Point.

Since 1939, Global Refuge (formerly known as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service) has provided welcome and hope to more than three quarters of a million refugees, transforming lives and empowering New Americans with support and resources to begin anew. Our history reflects our own deep immigrant roots and passionate commitment to welcoming newcomers, especially those who are most in need and we are proud to continue that work in Maryland and Baltimore. In the last year alone, with the help of our affiliates around the country, we resettled 18,622 refugees, including 1,178 in Maryland, and served 473 clients in Baltimore and the surrounding areas.

**B. Support of Council Bill 24-0584**

Our mission at Global Refuge is to foster a world of just and welcoming communities. It is in this respect that I appear before you today to advocate for Council Bill 24-0584 and give our strong support to the efforts of the City of Baltimore to promote language access. Global Refuge supports Bill 24-0584 because: (1) Bill 24-0584 ensures Baltimore's response to a growing national need of language access for Limited English Proficient (LEP) communities that are increasingly providing urban city environments with renewed economic growth and vitality; (2) language access helps ensure integration and self-sufficiency and is a helpful tool to aid

businesses and efficient hiring and (3) elements of Bill 24-0584 will improve certain barriers that our immigrants and refugees experience.

*(1) Bill 24-0584 Will Ensure That Baltimore Is Responsive to Growing National Need*

There are federal requirements for language access, but increasingly, demographics are making the case for language access needs at the state and local level. Bill 24-0584 helps ensure that Baltimore will continue to benefit from immigrant and refugee growth by ensuring immigrants' and refugees' inclusion in city activity and, as appropriate, in civic life.

Under the federal government, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964<sup>1</sup> and Executive Order 13166 (titled, "Improving Access to Services by Persons with Limited English Proficiency"<sup>2</sup>) both provide the framework for federal requirements on language access. The requirements for language access at the state, city and local level, however, are less pronounced—despite tremendous demographic changes in the United States. For example, according to the 2019 American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau, 41.8 million people aged five or older speak Spanish at home, more than twice as many as in 1990.<sup>3</sup> About 22.6 percent of schoolchildren nationally do not speak English at home.<sup>4</sup> In 2019, only 12 U.S. states updated court procedural rules and other policies to assure compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other laws and executive orders concerning language access.<sup>5</sup> The national need for language access was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, during which language access issues in health care abounded, as hospitals struggled to treat sick patients with limited English proficiency who didn't always have access to interpreters.

Population shifts in Baltimore mirror national trends, demonstrating a greater need for language access. From 2010 to 2019, the number of speakers of other languages in Baltimore grew from 52,594 (9% of the population 5 years of age and older) to 56,188 (almost 10% of the total population 5 years of age and older).<sup>6</sup> While that growth may seem modest, the City's overall population declined by approximately 20,000 people during that same period.<sup>7</sup> This parallels national trends: Immigration reinvigorates urban areas and mitigates population loss, bolstering the workforce and support the economy for generations to follow. To enhance the positive impact of immigrant communities on Baltimore and further mitigate population loss, Baltimore

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<sup>1</sup> Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects individuals from discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, and national origin in programs that receive federal financial assistance, and national origin has been interpreted to include language. Failure to ensure that persons who do not speak English very well, or are "limited English proficient," can effectively participate in, or benefit from, federally assisted programs may violate Title VI's prohibition against discrimination based on national origin.

<sup>2</sup> In 2000, President Bill Clinton issued [Executive Order 13166](#), titled, "Improving Access to Services by Persons with Limited English Proficiency," Executive Order 13166 requires federal agencies to assess and address the needs of otherwise eligible persons seeking access to federally conducted programs and activities who, due to their limited English proficiency, cannot fully and equally participate in or benefit from those programs and activities.

<sup>3</sup> Why Language Access Matters, Background: Key Figures, Language Access Matters, available at <https://languageaccess.org/background-why-language-access-matters/> (accessed 10/21/24).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> I Speak Baltimore, Language Access Toolkit [Demographic Data | Language Access Toolkit \(baltimorecity.gov\)](#) (accessed 10/21/24).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

city agencies can make Baltimore an even more welcoming city by providing language access services.

*(2) Language Access Helps Ensure Integration and Self Sufficiency and Is a Helpful Tool to Aid Businesses*

In our work at Global Refuge, we serve immigrants and refugees daily in a variety of state, local, urban, suburban, and rural settings. Our work involves ensuring individuals are primed to successfully integrate into the United States and develop the skills, or utilize existing skills, to ensure economic independence, family and community cohesion, and a dignified life free of persecution or danger. Ensuring that immigrants and refugees can access important information about benefits, services and compliance requirements is a key part of the integration process. We note with positivity the growing inclusive approach of federal agencies with respect to language access, most notably the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Language Access Plan, which was released in November 2023.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to what we've seen from federal agencies such as DHS, we have found growing recognition of the need to address language access from the business community. Businesses are increasingly realizing that immigrant and refugee workers can contribute to businesses even while they are learning the local language. Companies can gain a competitive advantage in the global economy by expanding their talent pipelines to fill open roles, increasing language diversity within their workforces, expanding the markets they can serve, growing the products they can offer, and better representing customers and communities.<sup>9</sup>

By implementing solutions that help overcome language barriers for immigrant and refugee talent, companies can unlock hidden value for their businesses and support the economic integration of their workers. At Global Refuge, I have seen this firsthand through the work of our Preferred Refugee Employers (PRE) Program, an innovative program that connects employers with refugees ready and wanting to work in their community. Through the PRE program, we have connected both national and local employers to refugees for long-term legal work opportunities. One of the main draws of the program is the ability to communicate and tap into a new workforce, refugees, who may be underutilized in the community, due to a lack of access and a lack of engagement. The program includes English as a Second Language (ESOL) classes and encourages employers to hire individuals who may speak both the language of the prospective refugee workers and English. Through these initiatives, we have seen the importance and value of language access as well as its positive impact on both refugees and newcomers' employment prospects and on the businesses that employ them.

*(3) Bill 24-0584 Will Help to Eliminate Certain Barriers Immigrants and Refugees Experience*

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<sup>8</sup>U.S. Department of Homeland Security Language Access Plan November 2023 available at [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2023-11/23\\_1115\\_dhs\\_updated-language-access-plan.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2023-11/23_1115_dhs_updated-language-access-plan.pdf) (accessed 10/21/24).

<sup>9</sup>Bridging Language & Work Solutions to Invest in Immigrant and Refugee Talent, Tent.org, February 2022, available at [https://www.tent.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Tent\\_BridgingLanguageWork\\_2.7.22.pdf](https://www.tent.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Tent_BridgingLanguageWork_2.7.22.pdf) (accessed 10/21/24).

Through our work at the Global Refuge Baltimore Welcome Center in Fells Point and with Baltimore Department of Social Services (DSS), we have seen language access create barriers or unnecessary interventions that can make accessing services in Baltimore difficult for immigrants and refugees. For example, currently, DSS has no way of tracking which local Baltimore city office or department is not implementing language access and translation services. Instead, the reporting on whether a department is providing such services comes from clients or community-based organizations. The language proposed by Bill 24-0584 helps to clarify which city department will be required to submit language access plans and have a relevant point of contact. Additionally, Bill 24-0584 will help ensure compliance by the requirement of an annual report and review. This will provide clarity on when clients can realistically expect translation services as well as documents and website information in other languages besides English. Additionally at our Baltimore Welcome Center, clients frequently struggle to access and attend medical appointments independently due to language barriers, and health clinics can be inconsistent in providing interpretation services, particularly for dental appointments. This makes it difficult for individuals to independently attend such medical appointments and requires staff to attend and take more time to assist which could be devoted to other clients and services. As Bill 24-0584 will provide more information and services available in designated citywide languages, we believe this will lead to greater self-independence, predictability of experience and integration of immigrants and refugees into Baltimore.

### **C. Conclusion**

I urge you to favorably approve Bill 24-0584 to the Baltimore City Council, to ensure that our immigrant residents and communities continue to be represented in Baltimore City government and ensure all Baltimore City residents have equitable access to the City's essential services and vital information. We look forward to working with you to help implement this important policy and collaborate to the extent possible to continue welcoming, accompanying and integrating immigrants and refugees into our vibrant community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Baltimore, Maryland  
October 23, 2024

Dear Chair Conway and members of the Baltimore City Public Safety & Government Operations Committee,

We urge you to favorably approve **Bill 24-0584**, introduced on September 16, 2024, to codify Baltimore City's language access policy and to solidify its commitment to language access for all City residents. This bill would also designate the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MIMA), which holds an integral role in supporting the successful integration and celebration of immigrants and refugees in Baltimore City, as the entity responsible for coordinating the implementation of the City's language access policy and ensuring Baltimore City government is in compliance with federal law. On its best day, local government acts as an advocate for those citizens who are most often left voiceless, ensuring that all our neighbors have the ability to access and participate in the activities of public life.

Baltimore City is home to almost 57,000 individuals (10.3% of the city's population) who speak a language other than English at home, and over 20,000 of those individuals speak English less than very well. These individuals are Limited English Proficient (LEP), meaning that they do not speak English as their primary language and have limited ability to speak, write, or understand English. According to the U.S. Census, the top five languages spoken by LEP individuals in Baltimore are: Spanish or Spanish Creole (9,659), Arabic, (1,622), Chinese (1,515), French (1,451), and Korean (658).

This bill would create greater equity and inclusion for Baltimore's New American population. Immigrants and refugees living and working in Baltimore city, face unique challenges as they navigate City services. Not only do they face challenges to adjusting to a new culture and home, but the limited availability of information in their languages presents a barrier to learning and acclimating to a new environment. These communities contribute a diversity of perspectives, skills, and experiences to Baltimore City; and as residents, they also have the right to access essential city government services, programs and information. The passage of **Bill 24-0584** would further solidify the City's

commitment to equity, and to advancing the rights of all Baltimoreans, regardless of the language they speak.

This bill would also ensure that MIMA takes the lead on coordinating the implementation of City policies and protocols for language access services, and ensuring the City's compliance with federal law, including language access protections and requirements under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and Federal Executive Order 13166. We believe that Baltimore's language access policy needs a sustainable path forward, and an entity that is essential to sustain the City's efforts toward equity. MIMA is in the best position to lead, based on its record of leadership in the area of language access, in partnership with community-based organizations, immigrant-serving groups and others in the private sector. For example, MIMA's language access work became critically important during the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure immigrant and refugee communities had access to life-saving relief programs, health and safety information, and other emergency services.

Like many cities across the United States, Baltimore exists with vibrancy, tenacity, and charm because of its rich history and the continued presence of immigrant residents and communities. **We ask that you approve Bill 24-0584 favorably to the Baltimore City Council**, to ensure that our immigrant residents and communities have equitable access to Baltimore City government.

Sincerely,

### Organizations

AROS (Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools Baltimore)  
Archdiocese of Baltimore  
Asylee Women Enterprise  
Baltimore Teachers Union  
CASA  
CAPSI (Centro de Apoyo Para la Superación del Inmigrante)  
Disability Rights Maryland  
Ethiopian Eritrean Special Needs Community  
Latino Economic Development Center  
Public Justice Center  
SOMOS  
Speech Garden  
Total Health Care, INC.

## Individuals

Ricardo Ortiz, District 6

Desi Velazquez

Jimara Kocik

Ariel La, M.S., CCC-SLP

Caitlin Cumerma, District 14

Xin Wang, District 14

Stephanie Dolamore, District 14

Walda Yon, District 1

Maureen Wambui

Nathan Ferrell

Maria Belen Parra

Yenis Aguilera

Marlen Gamez

Rosa Flores Gonzalez

Litarsha Robinson, District 13

Mayra Salgado Chicas

Abe Stolbach, District 11

Felicitas Cano

Doleen Holley, District 8

Suleyca Luna

Tobias Pessoa Gingerich, District 7

Wendy Medrano

Debora Hidalgo

Deysi Ramos

Norma Murcia

Earvin González, Resident District 2, Work District 13

Madeleine Monson-Rosen, District 1

Irma Maldonado, District 11

Leilani Jones, District 2

Mahbuba Islam

Lucia Sosa

Matthew Minor, District 13

Mirian Jara, District 1

Agatha So, District 14

Saya Kakim

Nilsa Yurivilca Zuasnabar, District 14

Cristina Sáenz de Tejada

Mackenzie Nargiz, District 13

Lea Mejia

Rugiatu Koroma, District 10

Lia Garcia

Ingrid Coby

Alejandra Flores Miller, District 1

Thomas Landers, District 14

Ashley Good, District 3

Milena I. Cordoba Guerrero

Gavin Loney, District 14

Gina Calva Cuenca

Cassidy Sell, District 14

Cesia Calero, District 12

Marilyn Saavedra

Martin Rios

Mariela Rodriguez, District 11



10/23/2024

Good Afternoon

My name is Zeinab AlAli and I live in Woodring.

I support Bill 24-0584 to codify the City's language access Policy.

As a Baltimore City resident of 7 years and a student and I live alongside immigrants / refugees / undocumented immigrants / New Americans. They have overcome substantial barriers to create a home here in Baltimore, and they helped the community by working in hard working jobs like construction.

I support Bill 24-0584 because:

- The Bill would provide help and understanding to those who have limited English proficiency.
- The Bill would provide job opportunities for interpreters.

Again, my name is Zeinab AlAli and I live in Woodring.

I urge you to favorably approve Bill 24-0584 to the Baltimore City Council, to ensure that our immigrant ~~and~~ residents and communities continue to be represented in Baltimore City government.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

OCTOBER 20, 2024

Good afternoon,

My name is Mirian Maurizara and I live in Ellwood Park area. I support Bill 24-0584 to codify the City's language access policy.

As a Baltimore City resident of 3 years and a Patterson High School student, I live alongside immigrant refugees/undocumented immigrants/New Americans. They have overcome substantial barriers to create a home here in Baltimore, and do construction.

I support Bill 24-0584 because

- Without interpreters LEP community people won't have access to services they need
- Having interpreters can help others understand each other

Again, my name is Mirian Maurizara and I live in Ellwood Park. I urge to favorably approve Bill 24-0584 to the Baltimore City Council to ensure that our immigrant residents and communities continue to be represented in Baltimore City government.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

10/23/2024

Good Afternoon,

My name is Jester Calderon and I live in Hopkins Bayview. I support Bill 24-0584 to codify the City's language access policy.

As a Baltimore City resident of 10 years and a student at Patterson High School, I live alongside immigrants/refugees/undocumented immigrants/new Americans. They have overcome substantial barriers to create a home here in Baltimore, and help in restaurants.

I support Bill 24-0584 because

- My family are LEP that need interpreters
- Without interpreters my family can't access services.

Again my name is Jester Calderon and I live in Hopkins Bayview. I urge you to favorably approve Bill 24-0584 to the Baltimore City Council, to ensure that our immigrant residents and communities continue to be represented in Baltimore City government.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

10.23.24

Good Afternoon.

My name is Raymond Alabi and I live in Frankfo  
I support Bill 24-0584 to codify the city's language  
access policy.

As a Baltimore City resident of 7 years and  
a ~~former~~ student of Patterson High School, I go to  
school alongside with immigrants/refugees/undocumented  
immigrants/New Americans. They have overcome substantial  
barriers to create home here in Baltimore, and my  
~~own~~ <sup>family</sup> friends have helped people in streets with low  
level language to understand others.

I support Bill 24-0584 because

- I want to help people with ~~low~~ English level to be able to get Medical services.
- I want to help communication better in ~~the United States~~  
~~of America~~ Baltimore City.

— Again My Name is Raymond Alabi and I live in Frank  
I urge you to favorably approve Bill 24-0584 to the  
Baltimore city Council; to ensure that our immigrant resi  
and communities continue to be represented in Baltimor  
city government

Thank you for your time and consideration.



MAYOR'S OFFICE OF  
**CHILDREN &**  
**FAMILY SUCCESS**



BALTIMORE CITY  
**COMMUNITY  
ACTION PARTNERSHIP**

October 23, 2024

The Baltimore City Community Action Partnership (BCCAP) Centers provide essential services such as rental, utility, and eviction prevention support.

10.3% of the city's population speak a language other than English at home. The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MIMA) plays a vital role in ensuring equitable access to vital services and that language barriers are reduced.

The five CAP Centers operating across the city serve an array of constituents from various backgrounds. Many families come to us in crisis and should not have the added stress of language as a challenge to accessing city services and information.

The CAP Centers are here to support all families, and we look forward to seeing the continued support and commitment of the City of Baltimore to be an inclusive city where all residents can live, work, and thrive

October 23, 2024

Councilman Mark Conway, Chair  
Public Safety and Government Operations Committee  
Baltimore City Council  
100 N. Holliday Street  
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Chair Conway and Members of the Baltimore City Public Safety & Government Operations Committee,

On behalf of the Language Access Oversight Committee, I am writing to express our strong support for Bill 24-0584 aimed at advancing language access in Baltimore City. The Language Access Oversight Committee, a group of dedicated volunteers, plays an essential advisory role to the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MIMA) in ensuring that language access is fully integrated into city services and communications.

Among the committee members are members of Baltimore's foreign-born and LEP communities, or staff of organizations and institutions serving these communities. We witness firsthand the critical need for meaningful language access to ensure all residents can engage with and benefit from public services. The proposed legislation aligns with our mission to foster an inclusive, equitable city where non-English speakers and those with limited English proficiency are not left behind.

This bill represents a pivotal step forward in guaranteeing that vital information is accessible to all Baltimore residents, regardless of the language they speak. By codifying language access as a legal requirement, the City Council will solidify Baltimore's commitment to equity, inclusion, and social justice for all Baltimoreans, including immigrant communities.

We urge the Committee to provide a favorable report for Bill 24-0584 and take the necessary actions to strengthen language access protections. We stand ready to offer our continued support to MIMA and the City Council in achieving this critical goal.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue and for your dedication to ensuring that all Baltimore residents have a voice in their government.

Sincerely,

On behalf of the Language Access Oversight Committee

Georgina Baez  
Miriam Carrion de Moore

Jacklyn Deacon  
Yakob Hagos Ghirmay  
Mahali Mackintosh  
Carolina Paul  
Desiree Velazquez



Komite Ayiti, Inc

5408 Parkside Place  
Baltimore, MD 21206  
[www.komiteayiti.org](http://www.komiteayiti.org)

October 21, 2024

To: Mayor and City Council of Baltimore: Hearing Committee

We are writing to express our unwavering support for Bill 24-0584, which codifies Baltimore City's Language Access Policy and ensures equitable access to essential City services. As an organization that has benefited from language access, we understand how crucial it is for individuals to communicate effectively and access resources without barriers.

Language access is essential for fostering inclusivity and ensuring all voices are heard in our community. By supporting this bill, we can create a more equitable city where everyone has the opportunity to succeed.

Thank you for your attention to this vital matter and your leadership.

*Garry Bien Aime*

Garry Bien Aime  
President  
Komite Ayiti





# LATINO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Stable Housing. Thriving Businesses. Strong Communities.

[www.ledcmetro.org](http://www.ledcmetro.org)

@ledcmetro

October 22, 2024

Julia Sarmiento

*Tenant Service & Eviction Prevention Program Manager*

Latino Economic Development Center-LEDC

3500 Boston Street Suite 227

Baltimore, Maryland 21224

Good afternoon members of the *\_ Public Safety and Government Operations Committee!* My name is Julia Sarmiento and I am the Tenant Services and Eviction Prevention Program Manager at the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC)-overseeing tenant services in Baltimore City. I am grateful for the opportunity to testify before you today and ask for your support on Bill 24-0584 (introduced Sep 16, 2024) and why it is important.

We urge you to favorably approve **Bill 24-0584**, to codify Baltimore City's language access policy and to solidify its commitment to language access for all City residents. On its best day, local government acts as an advocate for those citizens who are most often left voiceless, ensuring that all our neighbors have the ability to access and participate in the activities of public life.

LEDC is a nonprofit organization, and our mission is to drive the economic and social advancement of low-to-moderate income Latinos/immigrants and other underserved communities by equipment them with the skills and tools to achieve financial independence and become leaders in their communities. For the past 30 years, LEDC has provided economic development services in underserved communities-serving over 4,000 individuals a year.

I am here today to ask for your support on the above-mentioned bill to help make Baltimore, the City that will not only open its doors to immigrants but that it will make immigrant, new commers feel welcome in a city where 10.3% of its population speak a language other than English at home.

We ask that you help bring more bilingual speaker personnel to the various Baltimore City agencies that work to help low to moderate-income families.

Between 2021 and 2024, LEDC ~~has helped over~~ 1000 Baltimore City tenants of which more than half were of Hispanic origin. The majority of the head of household do not speak English and depend on having their children interpret for them. LEDC has been able to help these families due to our staff being fully bilingual (Spanish and English) but the work that we do does not provide them with the final answer to their application. On a weekly basis we receive calls from tenants requesting status on their rental, snap or OHEP application.





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We have heard many of our clients complains about the service they receive when they call or personally visit the City offices requesting assistance. It is sad to hear that a client is turned away because they are unable to communicate with a Baltimore City staff only because they cannot speak English. Help ensure Baltimore City Government is in compliance with federal law by giving your support on Bill 24-0584.

We know this work does not end here and as the immigrant community continues to grow in Baltimore City, we want to be better prepared to help make them feel welcome and that they can call Baltimore City their new home. For this reason, I respectfully urge you to support Bill 24-0584.

The passage of Bill 24-0584 would further solidify the City's commitment to equity, and to advancing the rights of all Baltimoreans, regardless of the language they speak.

Thank you, again, for your time and consideration.

Julia Sarmiento

[Jsarmiento@ledcmetro.org](mailto:Jsarmiento@ledcmetro.org)

Phone number: 410 634 7655



10.23.24

Good afternoon,

My name is Omari Jeremiah and I am here on behalf of Next Generation Language Access in support of Bill 24-0584, which would codify Baltimore City's language access policy. Next Generation Language Access is based in Highlandtown, Brooklyn, and Federal Hill neighborhoods of Baltimore .

As Founding Director at Next Generation Language Access, I work to serve immigrants/refugees/undocumented immigrants/New Americans by training high school students to become professional interpreters.

I support Bill 24-0584 because:

- This bill resonates with our organization's mission to ensure that everyone, regardless of the language they speak, is able to effectively access community services they need to thrive in Baltimore City.

Again, my name is Omari Jeremiah and I speak on behalf of Next Generation Language Access.. I urge you to favorably approve Bill 24-0584 to the Baltimore City Council, to ensure that our immigrant residents and communities continue to be represented in Baltimore City government, and ensure all Baltimore City residents have equitable access to the City's essential services and vital information, regardless of their language.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

I am Carolina Paul, the managing paralegal from the housing team at the Public Justice Center, testifying in support of this bill to codify the city's language access policy. Our housing team works with Baltimore City renters who are facing eviction or whose landlords are not making critical repairs.

The PJC serves a high proportion of Limited English Proficient people. On the housing team, I often advise renters to interact with city services- whether by applying for rental assistance at BCCAP, requesting a code enforcement inspection, or by filling out a Water for All application. Sometimes they report back that a city agency hung up on them or told them to come back on a specific day. When services are only available in English, it creates confusion and a lack of trust in city services. It's unfair to send these capable adults through a maze of referrals when their English speaking neighbors simply have to call the right phone number, stand in the right line, or visit the correct website.

Providing meaningful access to city services across language barriers isn't easy. If it were, we wouldn't need this legislation. But it's an essential part of making sure that immigrants can thrive in Baltimore. Please approve Bill 24-0584.

Good afternoon; my name is Giuliana Valencia-Banks. I am a resident of District 7, a proud member of the Mayor's Hispanic Commission, and an immigrant from Peru. I want to express my strong support for Bill 24-0584, which aims to establish Baltimore City's Language Access Policy into law. This policy is crucial for guaranteeing that all city residents, including immigrants and refugees, have fair access to vital services, programs, and essential information that can enhance and save lives. Additionally, this change would ensure that Baltimore City complies with Federal Law. As a 16-year resident of Baltimore City and a former human service provider, I have seen firsthand the challenges faced by individuals with limited English proficiency, particularly the significant barriers they encounter when trying to access basic city services and crucial information. Language should never stand in the way of accessing vital services, understanding public health guidelines, or feeling included in our hometowns. This policy is vital as it guarantees that all residents can access city services in a language they understand. Without an official Language Access Policy, many Baltimore City residents are left disconnected from city services and are not welcomed in all the places where decisions are being made. To make Baltimore a truly inclusive and just city, it is crucial that all residents can communicate effectively with our local government, regardless of the language they speak. I strongly urge the Committee to approve Bill 24-0584 and make this important policy a reality, ensuring that no resident is left behind due to language barriers.